

George Morris, 2008 Clinic, Chilliwack, BC

George Morris is a long-time member of the USET, an Olympic medalist, coach of Olympic medalists, columnist for 'Practical Horseman', developer of the American System of jumping, and author of the classic text Hunter Seat Equitation.

Session 1

Covenants:

- 1. rigid self-discipline**
- 2. doing things the 'right' way**
- 3. taking beautiful care of your horse**

First of all, teach your horse to always go to the track.

Legs: a well trained horse does not need constant leg. Use a spur and whip to supplement your leg. Keep your stirrup close to your toe. Have the right length of stirrup for either flat or jumping (whatever you are doing).

E: three poles, 18' (?) apart, trot and canter back and forth over them

Jumping often makes horses rush.

E: pole, 18' to X, walk, stop, back
- when you stop a horse, raise your hands

Crosses encourage horse to go straight

E: opening rein over fence to turn. Take jump straight, then turn

Keep thumb on top of rein.

Look up and ahead, not at horse

Impulsion does not equal speed. Impulsion is light, energy. Impulsion is a horse's moral quality; thinking 'forward'.

EXERCISE:

Your outside rein is your watchdog. It controls straightness and impulsion. Watch that the horse does not escape though the outside shoulder or let the hip go to the outside.

Session 2

Address mouth problems:

1. with the vet: rule out any medical/teeth issues
2. with bits
 - a. George Morris prefers snaffles
 - b. Is the horse is too strong/hot for a snaffle, progress to a snaffle with a twist, a double twisted wire (not single wire), a Pelham or a kimberwicke
 - c. Hackamores create turning problems
 - d. Rubber bits allow horses to get too draggy

EXERCISE:

Outside rein indirect/neck rein

EXERCISE:

Use both hands to turn

The first 2/3 of the horse's neck should be straight, and just the front 1/3 should be flexible

Turning in the air: start turning 1-2 strides before the fence, once you get your distance. Don't sit too deep in the turn – this causes horse to get hollower. Use more leg. Use a little haunches-in on the turn.

The jump makes the horse round (as does flatwork).

EXERCISE:

For a horse that is twisty and hangy: add leg. Verticals package horse and teach him to get round.

EXERCISE:

Spooky horse: look up and ahead

Ignore him

Use outside rein

Lots of vet problems we create with draw reins and improper riding.

Stick with natural and classical horsemanship.

Session 3:

For jumping, the upper body is more adjustable than it is in other disciplines.

In posting trot: the thrust of the horse should send you out of the saddle. Don't produce impulsion with the upper body. Use the legs/cluck.

From sitting trot, close the hip angle and then begin to post. Keep it effortless.

Trot/halt transitions: keep leg in contact with horse's ribs. Keep contact with mouth to keep horse's attention.

Rein back: do from hand, with very little leg.

Serpentine with simple change through walk: 4 loops. Repeat.

EXERCISE: three regular trot poles. Progress to 3 trot poles, followed by leg yield to wall.

EXERCISE: ½ circle to reverse. ½ turn in reverse.

EXERCISE: centre line, leg yield left and right.

EXERCISE: X pole, reverse turns at either end of ring.

Jumping position: weight is displaced to heels. Be slightly out of tack, not too far.

Flying change: use outside leg. School with crop and leg yield.

Jumping:

- 1. Get it done**
- 2. Sooth it out** – use less leg, less upper body (apparently less)

Ducking: throws horse off balance; very unsightly
- causes horse to go faster and get quicker

Oxer: coming off corner loose, give with hands from corner

Keep pace very even; not much position change

Important re: distance. Make a decision, quick and definite, and go with that. Live with your decision.

EXERCISE:

Keep a quiet and passive upper body.

Distances need to be round, not long.

For a horse that props, stops, runs out: go slow but ride stronger.

EXERCISE:

Go very straight between to get the distance.

Drop your hand, turn your horse to the rail at a 90 degree angle; let the fence stop him (not the rider)

This exercise softens a horse without having to use the mouth; makes the horse wait.

Don't confuse schooling with stroking; patting the horse is for the rider.

Use punishment and reward.

Punishment = *any active aid* = pressure.

Reward = *lack of pressure* = release causes/creates relax

Session 4

Rider must sit to front of saddle. Sit on crotch with the seat out behind.

The base of support involves all lower body parts touching the saddle.

Foot should be $\frac{3}{4}$ out of stirrup, with stirrup angled and toe on outside branch of stirrup.

Upper body: chest up and out.

Hands should be a couple of inches apart, over withers, with thumbs just inside vertical.

Upper body should be 5 degrees in front of vertical at sitting trot.

Sitting trot and canter and walk are all the same position; halt is closer to the vertical.

Hand gallop – have a position like in posting trot.

For a fresh horse:

Keep it walking instead of making it stand; don't insist horse stands still.

Freshness reduces animation.

Let animation escape to the front.

Equitation is the greatest basis for riding.

It gives you correctness, the habit of position, schooling of aids.

Ian Millar is a product of equitation and hunter riding. He is a classist.

Use equitation not as an end in itself but as a means to an end.

What rein do you use the most?

A direct rein.

Use a direct rein to stop, slow, back and turn.

Use this most of the time, but not all of the time.

EXERCISE: while standing, put the bight of the rein on the left side, create a pulley rein.

When horse reacts, release.

Shorten reins by sliding, not creeping.

Crops/sticks: loops are dangerous. Don't use them.

Hold your stick in whichever hand you are handed.

What means a lot to the horse is a relaxation of pressure.

EXERCISE: at trot: pull up with pulley rein. Release.

Canter/halt with pulley rein. Repeat.

- special use for galloping, jumping, xc
- teach horse to respond
- re-balance, stop, turn, back
- very useful rein aid
- set inside rein

Lateral aids: aids on the same side. Used in circle, corner, shoulder in.

Diagonal aids: left on one side, hand on another; haunches in, canter transition.

EXERCISE: shoulder in, then haunches in, to shoulder in, to haunches in.

- gets horse good to leg and more active behind

Poles should never be more than a 4'9" max.

Tongue over bit: use a rubber tongue depressor, cross noseband

EXERCISE: centre line – shoulder in left and right.

Short release: hands near withers, rest on neck. Go back and forth over fence, use fence at end of ring to stop.

Cross encourages horse to go straight.

EXERCISE: opening rein over fence to turn. Take jump straight, then turn.

Keep thumb on top of rein.

Look up and ahead, not a horse.

Q & A

1. Pulley rein: leverage action; useful for galloping, jumping, cross country
 - press into wither with inside hand, close outside hand
2. Teaching should be supplemented by literature
 - reading and pictures
3. Horse that pulls: Try a different bit. Be careful with dressage, hacking, galloping. Be bit savvy.
4. Ride horse on the flat with a full cheek snaffle. Jumping: use a twist, corkscrew, double twisted wire. Pelhams are okay, kimberwicks can be hard but are fine. Doesn't like gags. No control or turning ability with a hackamore.
5. Prefers 16-17 hand horses. Olympic horse 15.3 ½. Calypso was 16 hands. Rhythmical was 16 hands. All the US Olympic horses this year were 16.1. A big horse, in order to be good, needs to be light on his feet, soft in the mouth, soft going. Have a good jumping mechanism, use the back and quarters well.
6. Exercises to make a horse soft don't take years, they take minutes.
7. Amateurs jump from the wrong distances. Every 3-4 jumps, put him deep because the horse needs to learn how to do it himself.
8. How many days a week should you jump? No more than three. A very confirmed Grand Prix horse might only need to jump at shows. If you jump more than three days a week, you are mentally crippling the horse, making him body sore and foot sore. Never over jump a horse.
9. How much flat schooling does a horse require prior to jumping?
At three to four years of age, a horse can be starting small fences, doing his jump schooling parallel to his flat schooling. At three, no more than 8-10 weeks, 2 times a week, popping little jumps. Increase with age.
10. Many/most of the top horses in history (Hugo Simone) are parallel in ability (Grand Prix dressage and Grand Prix jumping).
11. Hunter Derby:
George was discouraged by the direction of the hunter division today. Fences are too rampy now; they should be more like cross country fences. There needs to be more verticals. The height is very small. He first suggested 'High Performance

Hunters' – now called Hunter Derby. Brilliant. It is like a Grand Prix hunter division.

12. Top Riders in history:

Raymond Burr – stylists in both hunter and jumper

Bill Steinkraus “ “ “ “

Rodney Jenkins – could ride any horse

Manuel Umberto Cortez – very strong

Pierro d'Inzeo (Italy) – developer of the forward seat

Beezy Madden

Eric Lamaze

Ian Millar

13. The key to being a great horseman: don't do everything for the horse.
There are many great horsemen in Canada.

14. What to do about a horse that is a great jumper but difficult on the flat (still green)?

For a horse like that, you must be empathetic, have discipline, be a great horseman

- horses are products of discipline, but some will take 100%, others 80%, others 40%
- mares are more difficult, must know how to get what you want by going in through the back door. Choose your battles.
- *Discipline where/when you can, forget what you can.* If you're too dominant at the wrong time, you can ruin the horse. ***Compromise, have tact, empathy, pick your battles.***

15. Character is different than disposition.

16. Do you believe riders should start in the hunter ring?

People used to do hunters and graduate to jumpers – but the heights were different back then. The hunter ring is still the best place to get the basics. Recognize that you have to treat the boys differently. Most boys can progress quicker to the jumper ring to avoid them getting discouraged. George attributes Ian Millar's great polish to his experience in the hunter ring.

17. How do you keep a horse's enthusiasm for his job?

Jump only three times a week; work outside of the arena. At Hunterdon, George only had an outdoor ring and a field. At horse shows, he would work in every part of the show ground EXCEPT the warm up ring – doing dressage. Do different things. Trail ride. Turn the horse out in a safe location.

18. Joint/nutritional supplements: supplements prescribed in consultation with your vet are good. **First: always feed good quality hay and grain.** Give variety. Most people overdo supplements: **they try and substitute good riding and**

horse care with supplements and medicine. Don't fix the problem; instead, *don't create a problem in the first place.* There are too many vets and too many supplements out there. Vets, more often than not, are not riders, and *therefore try and solve riding problems with medical substitutions.* **The problem springs from incorrect riding and training.**

19. Breeds.

There used to be a lot of thoroughbreds around, and now there are more warmbloods. The Canadians have long touted the virtues of the 7/8 tb/warmblood cross (sport horse). Initially, thoroughbred were what were available to people – people rode 'racetrack rejects'. But what was available then were big, sound, rangy horses.

George went to Europe in the 1960s and was one of the first to bring over a warmblood: Calypso. Then everyone wanted a Calypso, so everyone went over to Europe.

Two things then happened simultaneously: warmblood importation increased dramatically, increasing the numbers of warmbloods here exponentially, and the quality and size and soundness of thoroughbreds coming of the track decreased; at the same time, the thoroughbred industry fell into a recession from which it has still not recovered (1980s to now). So therefore, there were fewer thoroughbreds available, and the quality was not there as readily.

BUT: there are still good quality thoroughbreds out there; it takes more to find them, and they often take a lot of work once you get them. They take time to develop. But they can still be top horses. The current recession might cause us to get more thoroughbreds back into the sport. Warmbloods are heavier, need bigger bits, are spookier at certain fences (Liverpool) – *the thoroughbred is ultimately cheaper and an easier ride.*

20. Leg dangler:

A horse that hangs his legs behind him, or has a leg that points down or back will fall down. Get rid of him. Never jump him.

If the knees are up, but he's loose below, this horse can be very good and have scope. Do gymnastics with tighter distances. Use airy fences, parallel oxers. Worse than a hanger is a horse that hangs one leg down.

21. Being a coach at a clinic (like this: the Mane Event) vs. being a coach at the Olympics:

Those are different hats. When you are chef d'equipe (like at the Olympics) you are an organizer and a manager. People have different systems (for riding, working with their horse) and it's not your job to change them. It's a different era now than back when all the riders were under one trainer (like the days of Bert deNemethy).

George is not a great compromiser with people, but he is a great compromiser with horses.

22. Define a good coach: When should you move?

A coach is just like school. You need to move up in grades and get different teachers once you've learned the material. In your life you should have three essential teachers:

- 1. the person who gets you going, gets your confidence**
- 2. the technician**
- 3. the mentor: a world class international level experienced person**

Don't care about a bedside manner. Care about expertise. Charisma. Magnetic attraction to keep you engaged. Knows how to stretch you, not break you. Constantly present challenges you are capable of solving. Not babysitters. Some daredevils and risktakers will scare you and you will stop riding.

23. How often do you ride?

Today, he has no horse; he is 'retired' and living in Florida. Thursday to Sunday, he is at shows. Monday to Wednesday he does not see a horse – just lies beside the pool.

One thing you're positive of *when you ride – you will fall off*. Today, he only rides at clinics.

Session 5

Tack check: anyone riding with a Pelham, ride off the snaffle rein. Running martingale must be attached to the snaffle rein.

Tips for instructors:

What is 'on time' is early: for a lesson, be a ½ hour early; for a show, be 2 hours early; for the Olympics, be 3 hours early.

When you're teaching, get there early and make sure the ring is in good shape, the footing level and fluffy.

Set the jumps, make sure the poles are colour coordinated.

Be overachievers with your stable management, the vet, the farrier, your dress.

Don't sit on the fence and smoke. Be better than that. It will rub off on your students.

Be ahead of the curve, be eager, be on the job.

Hands regulate impulsion created by the legs

- to have the best contact, have straight line from the elbow to the mouth
- French vs. German systems: French the hands are higher, German the hands are lower. The French system produces a better, lighter mouth and better balanced horse.

If the horse goes up above the bit, keep the contact, and keep the horse in front of your leg. Move forward to the hand, even in the halt. Have the horse in your hand. Close the hand. Don't pull him down, don't be rough. When he accepts, release. The system is

built on punishment (aka discipline = any active aid/pressure) and reward (= lack of pressure; release; relaxation of the aid).

The basic position of the hands is over the withers, slightly in front (of the withers) with bend in the elbow so that the elbow can play. **Straight elbows = stiff elbows; *that's bad*.**

The thumbs should be just inside the vertical. Fingers closed, wrists straight in extension of the elbow.

Carry your hands – don't drop the ball.

When walking: the elbow has to oscillate. Also at the canter and gallop. At trot, the elbow is stationary.

Reins need to be taut.

The simplest transition is trot to walk.

Only if the horse goes backward in the trot/halt transition do the legs act. Stretch up. Alternate transitions, throw in rein-back every so often.

At trot, change rein a few times. Lengthen across the diagonal.

Slow sitting trot to shoulder in to haunches in to shoulder in to haunches in – this gets the horse active and engaged. Gets the horse, supple, accepting the aids.

Keep the horse perfectly straight at the walk.

Counter canter. Introduce this on a straight line. Keep the horse collected, sit upright.

Trot, ½ turn to counter canter. Watch the whole horse, not just its neck. Keep the poll elevated. Trot to reverse turn. Counter canter to reverse turn in counter canter. Every stride you need to ½ halt. Walk to counter canter.

Wait for the horse; don't push the horse.

EXERCISE: 80' (6 strides)

Recipe to see distance: ½ way through the turn (@A) let go; see the top of the fence. Look for a distance and commit to that.

What produces the ½ halt is every single downward transition. Flat work is indispensable for jumping.

Most horses drift in; keep the outside rein.

Address the distance factor to the fence.

Liverpool: 1st time address with a cluck or stick or spur. Don't take this fence for granted.

A horse that chips or props: don't trust him. Add leg.

As you stop a horse, don't drop your hands.

Jigging: an impatient horse. **Walk a figure 8, don't make him stand.**

A jumping ½ halt is *different* than one used in dressage; more hand, less leg.

Spooky horse: open the chute, separate your hands.

Jumping should be even; you should be able to easily and quietly shorten and lengthen the horse without disrupting the rhythm. Surging and charging and choking the horse is the old fashioned way to do it.

People want progress and improvement.

Last Session

Horses need to learn and be aware and be ridden through every corner of the ring, but don't overbend them.

Trot: rising/2 point. Teaches balance and rhythm.

Serpentine of three loops in ½ arena (he called it 'counter change of rein'). Lightens horse's shoulder; an excellent exercise.

You must be able to mobilize the horse's shoulder and haunch.

Standing still: rock the horse slightly left and right with hands together. Use leg.

Turn on forehand: both directions.

Be more detailed with your equitation.

Walk/canter/walk transitions to counter canter: great control of the hindquarters.

Position is the most important aspect. The horse has to accept contact with legs right down to heel, seat, and hands. These are the natural aids. The horse also has to accept the artificial aids: spur, whip.

Submission is acceptance of contact, pressure, lack of pressure.

Every single schooling exercise is to develop confidence of the horse = this means rideability.

KEY: position contact exercises.

Elementary jumping: long release ½ way up mane.

Short crest release

Automatic release – don't touch the neck. Keep hands low.

Get a horse light, get its feet light. Rock its shoulders. Get the haunches right, do a little turn on the forehand. Don't let them escape by neck bending.

For a flying change, use your whip on the outside.

Don't seesaw: *this is the kiss of death.* Keep a steady contact.

Riding is simple.

Most horses drift: jump left, they might be sore right. If they are sound, fix a drift by turning in the aid. Use a leading/opening rein.

There are three ways you can ride:

1. with the motion – good
2. behind the motion – useful in some cases
3. ahead of the motion – bad

Liverpool: ride into it with hips closed, with the motion, in a crotch seat

- to get stronger: open the hip angle, sit deep, use a buttock seat. This is a defensive position, to be used with stoppers; it is not smooth or easy for either the horse or the rider.

Look up and ahead. Look for your line.

People don't have to 'get it' today/tomorrow/next week. But they do need to be sharp and do their research.

Bits are for people more than horses. George likes snaffles.

If you don't have control, you don't have confidence. If you lose confidence, you're frightened. You must have control: be disciplined.